

framework of the Singapore healthcare system treated in Chapter Eight might be considered in the holistic context of the aspects of the system treated in other chapters.

## REFERENCES

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*Planning the Lower Mekong Basin: Social Intervention on the Se San River*. ZEF Development Studies, Volume 16. By Ly Thim. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010. 223 pp.

*Floods and Farmers: Politics, Economics, and Environmental Impacts of Dyke Construction in the Mekong Delta/Vietnam*. ZEF Development Studies, Volume 18. By Pham Cong Huu. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011. 183 pp.

I have chosen to review these two books together because they deal with different, but related, issues in water-resource development in the lower Mekong Basin. Concerns related to development and to conflict in the Mekong Basin are in the news almost daily. These two books help us to understand the full picture and role of participants, ranging from the international donors and experts to those at the village and farm levels, who must bear the consequences of decisions in which they have had no part.

But first a caveat. These books are based on graduate thesis research, one of the most detailed pieces of research that these students may undertake in their lifetimes. Theses are published regularly in doctoral series by the Center for Development Studies (ZEF) at the University of Bonn as well as at other institutions such as Wageningen. By contrast, the thesis in economics and other branches of the social sciences is now often composed of three journal articles in many universities, particularly in the United States. Journal articles are an important source of information. But when publishing journal articles (many of which go unread) becomes the major objective of graduate students and non-tenured faculty, the quality of the research suffers. The demands of the discipline discourage students from examining problems that are largely interdisciplinary.

In a sense, both books are about flood control or the lack thereof. *Planning the Lower Mekong Basin* centres on flooding that occurred in villages in Cambodia as a result of the release of water from the Yali Falls Dam in Vietnam. To put this event in context, Chapter Two deals with “social interface planning” and provides a discussion of river-basin management and development and their relation to hydropower development. Chapter Three provides a review of water-resource planning and development in the Mekong Basin. The author writes, “Water resource planning management in the Mekong Basin has been driven by international donors and engineers since the birth of the Mekong Project” (Ly Thim, p. 56). This project, which lasted from 1947 to 1956, was followed by the Mekong Committee and then the Mekong River Commission, each described by one author as “inactive” (Ly Thim, p. 78) with regard to conflict resolution.

In short, the six individual countries that make up the greater Mekong Basin have pretty much done what they pleased, particularly with respect to development of hydropower dams in their own backyards or the backyards of neighbours. The author concludes,

Overall, [the] planning process in the Se San river basin highly served the interest of the dam builders as well as the national development priority of the individual country and failed to take

into account the interest of local communities whose livelihoods depend on [the] river system for living. (p. 198)

Against this backdrop, however, there are occasional situations in which the political climate favours the local population. For example, Myanmar's president, seriously concerned with the environment, recently supported demonstrators and halted construction of the Myitsone Dam on the Irrawaddy River.

The second book, *Floods and Farmers*, is concerned with flood control in the deep water and brackish areas of the Mekong Delta. The focus is on Can Tho City. To put the local experience of Can Tho City farmers in context, the author provides a history of floods and flood control in the Mekong Delta in Chapter Two.

This history is followed by a description of the government dyke planning activities in Can Tho City in Chapter Three. The objective of government dyke planning was to increase rice production. The analysis of the dyke system implementation and planning at the district and community levels (Chapter Four) includes interviews with farmers regarding their needs and their perceptions of the dyke system. There has been conflict at the local level over whether low or high dykes were most appropriate, and local farmers were usually not consulted.

The final chapter discusses the lessons learned and suggestions for future research. It acknowledges that the government's dyke plan, although implemented top-down, has achieved considerable success in the short run. Although not noted in the book, the success of the programme has allowed Vietnam to become a world leader in rice exports. Increased hatching of fish and increased employment have also been seen as benefits. Despite this short-term success, the dynamics of the Mekong Delta suggest the need for future research and planning with respect to "(i) the widening gap between the better off and poorer farmers in the region and (ii) changes in land use due to industrialization and urbanization" (Pham Cong Huu, p. 172). There also are negative impacts of engineering interventions into the natural ecosystems that require further study.

Finally, I commend the authors on their work, but I conclude with a strong recommendation to the editors of the ZEF Development Studies series that they index their publications.

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